

# Bard

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# Bard

## THAW. MIST.

Ducks on the pond, small  
with a big head: white blaze.  
Fog even. Everything flows.

The mist clean of accident,  
almost essential. Thomist  
morning. Winter almost

over. The big March maybe.  
Comes through the snow.  
Soft wet brown wood.

\*

And every lovely thing around me  
that I see, all the glorious  
humility of the particular,  
everything seems lost.  
Lost to me, seen through a thick  
veil of my anxiety, compared  
to that portable egoism  
this fog is radiance  
personified. But no person here,  
really. The un-me, anxious.

Take away all the people  
whose love or hate induces  
my anxiety and who do I have  
left to tell this to? Doesn't  
the overhanging snowcrust  
above the stream need its  
gospel writer too, its Freud  
set to work to understand  
with all his sympathy at last  
the Oedipus of ice?

Everything needs me.  
But in my craven need  
for the love of my own kind

I have betrayed the silent  
antiphon of trust  
between me and the actual,  
the spill of beauty down  
under the old bridge, and  
the birds, those quick specks  
of meaning dart through mist.

11 March 2007

## JUST LISTENING

*(composed during Melvin Chen's recital, 11 March 2007)*

*(Bach's fifth French Suite)*

### Allemande

almost spring I wait to hear  
one good shoe deserves another  
walk in the wet woods

*binah*, the sad wisdom  
of having two feet  
of having to walk there

where the music already is  
weary Germans slogging  
down a muddy road

to get there, here,  
where everything also  
is waiting with me

### Courante

We'll get there before the sun does  
we were born before the moon  
we open our claws like crabs  
like the moon horns we grasp  
everything we are everything  
you ever knew and now know. No.

### Sarabande

Here it is, the famous thing  
the trick time plays  
and no one knows  
sometimes it is so much better  
not to hear what you hear.

## THE MOTIONLESS BALLET

There was an old woman  
stood alone on the stage  
said modestly "I am age"  
while the music rolled  
past her imitating time  
while she imitated you  
or me or anybody's cat  
scrabbling at the window  
towards a vanishing bright  
indifferent bird aloft.

\*

Program excludes me Franz  
it's birdseed for fish

I can barely follow  
the shadow from this tree to that

and you want me to hear a hero  
slogging through hell with

arpeggios biting his heels no  
leave me alone with the intervals

those slide rules of the soul  
Strauss knows so well o me

o my his billowing yearning  
desperate sensuous ninths,

\*

A phonebook lined with booths  
bosoms chances for selective  
misreadings, I can find anything  
here but you, you are always  
beside the point, that's why  
I struggle so hard to find it,  
the point of the jest, since you  
will be standing there smiling  
at me, right alongside.

\*

A white capsule  
sinister white plate  
with sunlight on it  
it tells me do  
something about  
all the shutness  
run my tongue  
to open up  
where you close.

**from Schumann's *Waldszenen***

*Jäger auf der Lauer*

Going into the woods  
means walking  
where hunters lurk

the hunter is a lion  
or thing like that  
and waits for you

ambush, the leaves  
drip with ancient rain.  
Recent amber

baby, how can a flower  
be lonely?  
How can a thing not be?

*Verrufene Stelle*

Weird place  
in woods,  
not a right place,  
haunted maybe

haunted space.  
inside a house  
all space is haunted

the walls  
irrelevant

it is where the spear  
of the sky  
strikes the anvil of the earth

we live in the clangor  
ever after  
the shudder.

It is the space itself  
that is haunted  
in certain places.  
The houses come and go,  
the shiver lingers.  
The shimmer at evening  
when you see it, them,  
passing through walls  
mirrors leaves outside  
the dust beneath your chair.

### *Herberge*

Why call it an inn?  
It is them.

Them with their milk  
their gin

the people who keep  
needing to take in.

Their songs  
will swallow you

the noise that brings you  
to the door

destroys you,  
your delicate

little difference.

*Vogel als Prophet*

If a bird had the power to tell me  
I would have the power to fly up and meet it  
there, where its news is coming from  
and break out of the circle my poor arms make.

11 March 2007  
12 March 2007



*[dreamt:]*

a wide intention to deceive:  
this is a street  
it goes somewhere.

11/12 III 07

from e-texts newly found:

**SUMMER'S ALPHABET**

**Ad** for a body you can put on:  
there are so many leaves on this one tree.

Depend on me, I was grammar  
before you were born and music after.  
]  
I have murmured over running water  
in morning shadow till the move of things

makes the world you found. You live  
in my wide house. Birds eat at me.

**Be** me, baby. Pulchritude  
is not an hour,  
no old movie.

I want to feel  
but lack the synapses  
long time eras'd in mental War.  
Swing me how, to teach  
sagesse in Matterland,  
transvestite in deep music.

How could I give you more than you are?  
Take medicine. Wrap it  
in the skin of a little animal  
you found on a road in France.

Travel silences the body.  
Wear it on a leather thong  
around your neck, let it  
sway and pounce between your breasts,

be mad at me. For I  
was lunatic and free  
and never stop whispering in you,  
listen,

I am with you forever, me a  
hedgehog crushed beneath  
a sky blue camion.

By the little glacial river  
falls a beaten trail and by the trail  
humans have been crouching  
for ten thousand years.

To crouch in bushes  
and breathe experimental words

while the body struggles to forget.

Clean folk are best.  
Who wipe with leaves and bathe  
thereafter. Cold drench  
and shiver. Never forgive me.

Never forget. Our money  
comes from the sky,  
this was language speaking,  
it talked until we understood  
there was a tale to tell with us  
morning is meant to say.

Everything flows down through us.  
Mont Blanc up there a part of your head.

**Cantharides** they used to say  
when Mary Butts was swinging in St Johns Wood,  
spanish fly and opium and ballet,  
the risks of culture in an alien skin.

Culture is ninety-five percent disparagement,  
the rest is grace. It falls on you  
sometimes in St Paul's, a mist  
of meaning gathers in the dome and lets you feel.

Or afternoons in Pimlico  
overtaking some rare pedestrian  
and looking quickly at her face and knowing  
this very woman could unmake your life.

Eye contact and pass by,  
a word will do you in.  
Keep silent, your tongue  
heavy-freighted with the drug of time.

20 June 1997

**Desperados** we have known  
at four a.m. hanging around bars  
in hopes that tipsy Ishtar this  
one night will come  
who never did and always does,

all sexes and all natures to disclose,  
nude at the gates of experience.  
Tolerate me for all my appetite.

We need to know. It's all we need,  
truly, that lap lights up the world.  
That's why they linger in their sweaty clothes  
forgetting they have a body of their own inside,

though not much good—  
what value has one's own?  
Only the other  
has color,  
only those other eyes, other-colored eyes  
are wide enough to see the truth.

Not that we need the truth.  
Four-thirty, and dawn insinuates transparency.  
Soon this hunger will  
be light enough to see  
the cars of morning coming,  
headlights on, the bridges full of hurry.

**Escort** service is what the stars provide,  
the Arab wizards said, the daemon of your Natality  
to keep you company. So when you say  
Egad it's hot today! your daemon understands  
you better than your skin. No smile is needed.

And certainly no word.  
Words have better uses: threading pearls  
to loop around a no less sweaty neck  
but this one smooth, sleek as an idea,  
shapely as a shift of wind,

serving as the little waxen string they use  
to tie clematis or roses to a latticed arbor.

Why is a flute? Why does the earth  
answer Sun with such appalling heat?  
Now just here the daemon could be helpful  
but is not. Sometimes he says  
important-sounding but elusive things, as:

In Baltistan there is a kind of sheep  
whose wool is rough enough to tear the shepherd's skin.  
(Pause for effect.) Or Mix bromine with 3/4 time and see.

Sometimes you come home and he's playing the piano,  
some tune you can't name and can't get out of your head.  
He looks at you and speaks with his absurd accent  
and smiling swarthy face: Language is only meant to praise.

20 June 1997

## NATIVITY

Escort service is what the stars provide, the Arab wizards said. The daemon of your horoscope is there to keep you company. So when you say It's hot today! or I feel bad, your daemon understands you even better than your skin. No argument is needed. Certainly no word. Words have better uses: threading pearls to loop around a no less sweaty neck. But this one is smooth, sleek as an idea, shapely as a girl's shift fondled by the wind; it serves as the little waxen string they use to tie clematis or roses to a latticed arbor.

Why is a flute? Why does the earth answer Sun with such appalling heat? Now just here the daemon could be helpful but is not. The daemon never seems to say more than you knew already, but often shifts the emphasis, so you're not sure if you know it or not. Sometimes he says important-sounding but elusive things, like: In Baltistan there is a kind of sheep whose wool is rough enough to tear the shepherd's skin. Then he'll pause for effect. Or he'll tell you to mix bromine with three-quarter time, and you almost know what he's talking about. But not quite. Beauty is the light of *almost* that shimmers around a clear meaning, and makes it more and less than what it says.

Sometimes you come home and he's playing the piano, some tune you can't name but can't get out of your head. He looks at you and speaks with his ridiculous accent and never-smiling face: Language is only meant to praise. Any other application is just sheet music, or the evidence of some ancient spiritual crime.

12 March 2007

[recast from a text of June 1997]

## THYMOL

properties of  
never get around in the first place to  
ride the wooden horse  
goes up and down around

to be as a child  
in a nest of motions  
teaching stillness in excitement  
the gift of later love  
half asleep on the warm  
pillow of eternal intersections

this was that child  
this floor that animal  
this square room filled with sun  
that whirling circle

when where was when  
it all began.

12 March 2007

## AuCl

Salt in everything.  
I would clean  
my system of

all save the salts of gold

**Aurunculeia** he wrote,  
encoding the prescription  
so those cut-rate Pitkin  
Avenue drugstores  
would not decode it,

every medicine is encoded in weird words,  
which is why I or such as he  
exist to begin with, to bring you

dripping with fake etymologies  
the actual chemical

I say you need, firmly, my hand  
hid in the hollows of your frame.

For gold will not rot will not wither,  
gold is soft and will not stiffen

it will find your marrow and bend your knees  
nimble by bedside  
clean stream between tall trees.

12 March 2007

= = = = =

We always need friends  
to take our adverbs away.

12 III 07



## ALL BIRDS ARE A WIFE

someone made of rain  
is better, the spill  
along horizon, ramps,  
the raunch of weather.

Crows first from all,  
the eldest. Every  
thing else is a failed crow.  
Or failed duck or phony eagle.

My three wives, the planet said,  
Egypt, and what did Egypt know.  
Egypt was a goose only,  
anser niloticus, or a hawk, a hawk,

branded neck, temple wall,  
slide fasteners any age now,  
Pharaoh's icebox.

A duck. A ruddy duck.  
Another, a bufflehead  
so small, on the beaverpond,  
one more wife.

\*

Did he love Bird because of birds  
or viced that versa? Did he?  
The double dumpling version  
of his sauerbraten, hold the cabbage.

Everything he loved was 86.

\*

There were Parisians here  
smart as teenage Mozart.

And Chateaubriand  
came up this road  
and stopped before my house  
suddenly, as if he heard  
a trumpet call.  
Asked for a glass of water.  
But there was no horn.  
Only the hammer  
of a pileated woodpecker  
in what would be my woods  
later, when the king was dead.

\*

Dragons are just big birds that nest on gold.  
Girls have a natural affinity with gold and birds.  
So there they are, frequently found at cave mouth  
of the dragon's nest. Stupid young men  
in metal suits sometimes clank by  
and misunderstand the situation, usually  
catastrophically. The birds flies away, the girl  
helps herself to some jewelry and goes home,  
the boy stretches out among the rocks and bleeds.  
If he's lucky, he'll get reborn as one of these.

\*

So he wound up composing at some cost  
a systematic ornithology of West Village  
drinking spots in the endless decades  
that crept along below the War.  
A streak of grey in one young woman's hair.  
A slim young man at the jukebox  
of the San Remo playing Nessun dorma  
over and over and over. He remembers  
this so vividly it has to mean something.  
He sweeps the dust behind the door.

13 March 2007

## PELERINAGE DE LA VIE HUMAINE

But what actually is it, this waking up  
and putting one leg out of bed then another  
and toddling up or down the hall to meet  
yourself in the mirror, who can resist  
that devilishly handsome face, even now,  
puffy from sleep like a line of Rilke,  
warm and lovable and inimitably you  
and here you are again, watching the stream  
of morning water (as the Mongols say)  
color with pale amber the simpleminded  
plumbing that still seems to work, works  
probably because it is so white, white  
as Ellesmere Island on a day in March  
and it's always Mozart somehow  
when you flick on the radio, that almost  
by now archaic solid on the side table,  
it makes noise a little like the music  
the announcer claims you're hearing.  
Why do they always say Amadeus anyhow?  
His name was Johannes Chrysostomus  
Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart for those  
who want to get technical, Amadé  
he signed himself with Frenchy swagger  
and Amadeus only was a joke he used  
to sign smutty letters to his friends.  
The end. Something new comes on  
you were too busy grouching about announcers  
to notice what was being announced—  
there's a theological parallel in that  
to seek, something Auden said maybe,  
but you weren't listening then either.  
Why isn't attention easier to pay?  
Theophilus means god-loving or God  
beloved, cunning amphibolity  
as Empson would have said, likely  
the nicest thing he could say about God,  
given the Cambridge debacle

and his long exile among a people  
who didn't care much for this idea of  
God, just one of Him and there He is.  
I think I'm still talking about Empson  
and I don't really know what Wolfgang  
means, it sounds like Wolf Path or  
Procession of Wolves through the Woods  
planning to meet up with a whole  
parade of Little Red Riding Hoods  
naked under their frocks like the fierce  
little girls (they look like girls) of Henry  
Darger. Christ, is being alive just  
all this endless namedropping?

14 March 2007

= = = = =

Cut something. What? Midnight.  
Raffle. Sound of tin struck.  
Miner yielding graphite near.  
Galena. Near neon. Some new  
decision the nuns made  
to write with pink chalk. Blue.  
The sound of you. Radiator  
music. Men tying red strings  
to bare trees yes. The bore  
of ancient weapons. Smoke.  
You saw one there, felt  
a smattering of sympathy  
wake along the base of your spine.  
Where someone sleeps then wakes  
to climb you as you climb. Where.  
Who. The erring animal of you.  
The blinkered eye. The comfort  
of your hood. Shielded from chance  
the deck of cards scattered  
in your lap. Twos and threes  
I like those best, unassuming.  
But every number from them comes.  
Even one. By magic, or *subtraction*,  
the mystery that the nuns taught next.

14 March 2007